

Before Starting Buprenorphine

Use this guide to prepare a starting conversation for opioid use disorder. Ask your prescriber to give you the individual medical instructions separately, and use these notes to make sure you understand how to follow them.

Keep completed notes private. Use short notes in each box; continue on another copy or separate paper when needed. Save the completed PDF on your device and reopen it to check your notes before closing.

Buprenorphine is a treatment for opioid use disorder that can reduce withdrawal and the desire to use opioids. Products and starting plans differ. Confirm the exact medicine and formulation prescribed for you; do not substitute another product or someone else's instructions. [3] [1]

Why the Starting Plan Matters

Starting buprenorphine too soon after certain other opioids can trigger sudden withdrawal, called precipitated withdrawal. Tell the prescriber which opioids you recently used, including fentanyl or methadone, when you last used them, and any previous difficult start. Your clinician should explain when and where to begin, what symptoms to watch for and whom to contact. A general number of hours cannot replace your individual starting instructions. [2]

Review Safety Before the First Dose [1] [4]

- Tell the prescriber and pharmacist about all medicines, supplements, alcohol and other substance use. Combining buprenorphine with benzodiazepines or other sedating drugs raises serious risks. This needs coordinated medical care; it does not automatically rule out treatment.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking buprenorphine. Do not drive or use machinery until you know how the medicine affects you.
- Keep medicine secure and away from children or anyone else. Never share it. Ask the pharmacist how to dispose of unused medicine.
- Ask what to do if you miss a dose, feel worse after starting, or cannot obtain the next prescription. Do not change or stop treatment on your own.

For Tablets or Films That Dissolve in the Mouth

These products can cause dental problems. After the medicine has completely dissolved, gently swish water around your teeth and gums and swallow; wait at least one hour before brushing. Arrange a dental visit soon after starting and tell the dentist about the medicine. Contact your clinician and dentist if tooth or gum problems develop. FDA says treatment benefits outweigh these dental risks; do not suddenly stop because of this warning. [3]

Prepare for an Overdose Emergency

Ask how to obtain naloxone and show someone you trust where it is and how to use it. If someone cannot be awakened or has slow or difficult breathing, call 911 in the United States. Give naloxone if available and stay until help arrives, following the product and dispatcher instructions. [1]

A Starting-Plan Conversation

Hypothetical script: "I want to start treatment, but I am worried about feeling worse. Here is what I last used and when. Please explain my own starting instructions and the symptoms that mean I should call. Who can help after hours, and what happens if the pharmacy cannot fill it?"

My Prescriber Conversation

Recent use and previous starts

Opioids, timing, other medicines or substances, and any previous difficult start. Include what you are unsure about.

My written starting instructions

Medicine and formulation; where the clinician's instructions are kept; when and where to begin; what you asked them to explain again.

If I feel worse or miss a dose

Specific instructions from the team; daytime and after-hours contact; when to seek urgent care.

Getting medicine and continuing care

Pharmacy or injection clinic, coverage and cost, availability, refills and follow-up appointment.

Safety arrangements

Medication review, dental care if applicable, transport, secure storage, naloxone and who knows how to use it.

These are original conversation prompts, not a diagnostic test or a dosing plan. Keep completed notes private and share only what you choose.

Learn More and Find Care

AddictionHelp: buprenorphine

<https://www.addictionhelp.com/treatment/medication/buprenorphine/>

FindTreatment.gov

<https://findtreatment.gov/>

Sources

[1] MedlinePlus: Buprenorphine Sublingual and Buccal

<https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a605002.html>

[2] SAMHSA: Buprenorphine Quick Start Guide

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/quick-start-guide.pdf>

[3] FDA: Dental Problems With Buprenorphine Dissolved in the Mouth

<https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-warns-about-dental-problems-buprenorphine-medicines-dissolved-mouth-treat-opioid-use-disorder>

[4] FDA: Caution About Withholding Opioid Addiction Medicines

<https://www.fda.gov/media/127688/download>